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CO-ORDINATION QUESTIONS

1990 REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION TO THE GOVERNING COUNCIL AT ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Summary

The 1990 report of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) to the Governing Council was adopted by ACC on 23 October 1990, and is submitted to the Council in pursuance of the Council's decision 15/11 of 25 May 1989, in which ACC was requested to continue to report to the Council on an annual basis.

The report is divided into two parts. The first deals with general co-ordination matters of interest to the Council, specifically the development of International Legal Instruments in the areas of climate, biological diversity, forests and marine pollution; United Nations system-wide preparations for the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident, and Environmentally Sound and Sustainable Development.

The second part of the report deals with the co-ordination and follow-up of the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD), and contains separate sections on Contributions to the Preparatory Process of 1992 UNCED, the forthcoming DESCON-7 and DESCON-8 sessions, Inter-Agency co-operation, and Implementation of the PACD in the Sudano-Sahelian Region.

INTRODUCTION

1. This report is submitted to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations System and of General Assembly resolution 32/172 of 19 December 1977 on the United Nations Conference on Desertification.

2. In its decision 15/11 of 25 May 1989, the Governing Council recalled its earlier decisions 14/2 and 14/4 of 18 June 1987, in which ACC was invited to continue to report to the Council on an annual basis on co-ordination. The Executive Director of UNEP convened a meeting of the Designated Officials for Environmental Matters (DOEM) in Rome from 18 to 21 September 1990, at the invitation of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), to consider environmental issues of common interest to the United Nations system. The meeting was preceded on 17 and 18 September by a meeting of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification. The present report was adopted by the ACC at its second regular session of 1990 on 23 October 1990.

3. The report is divided into two parts, the first dealing with certain environmental matters of current concern to the Governing Council and to ACC, the second with the co-ordination and follow-up of the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.

I. GENERAL ENVIRONMENT CO-ORDINATION MATTERS

4. ACC is well aware that environmental issues play an increasingly important role and receive growing attention, in particular in relation to developmental efforts, by member States in policy-making and by international organizations in their programme planning. The resolutions of the 42nd and the 44th Session of the General Assembly on environmental issues and the decision to hold a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989) underscore both the importance of environmental considerations in the development context as well as the desire to see the United Nations system address these issues more effectively.

5. ACC has previously expressed its view that the United Nations system is best suited to ensure that global environmental issues are approached in a co-ordinated manner and within a wide context, through the contributions of all organizations concerned. ACC reiterates its strong commitment to contribute to the preparatory process for the 1992 UNCED.

6. ACC notes the request of the General Assembly in resolution 44/229 of 22 December 1989 that the Secretary-General prepare a report reviewing the structure and responsiveness of the United Nations with respect to major environmental issues in order to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system in dealing with these matters is an integrated, coherent and effective way. The report should take into account the views of Governments and should be considered in the preparatory process of UNCED. The Executive Director of UNEP has been requested to assist the Secretary-General in preparing the report, and ACC expresses its readiness to co-operate fully in this effort.

7. ACC recalls the decision to arrange an International Conference on Water and Environment upon the initiative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). ACC notes that the Conference has been included in the preparatory process of UNCED. The Conference will be organized under the aegis of the ACC Inter-Secretariat Group for Water Resources (ACC IGWR). ACC notes that the ACC IGWR met in Geneva, 3-5 October 1990 in order to formulate substantive technical issues of the conference. ACC welcomes the preliminary offer of the Government of Ireland to host the Conference in January 1992.

8. ACC notes that the proposals for a strategy for the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan in the 1990s are being prepared by organizations of the United Nations system through the Inter-Secretariat Group for presentation to the Committee on Natural Resources (CNR) at its 12th session in March of 1991. Such a strategy could be transmitted by CNR to UNCED for its consideration as part of the material for the conference. The strategy will address itself to the Mar del Plata Action Plan as a whole, including issues related to water for sustainable agricultural development, water quality, water resources assessment, drinking water supply and sanitation, and water resources management and would constitute a major input to the International Conference on Water and Environment.

9. On regional co-operation and collaboration, ACC notes the discussions between the Executive Director of UNEP and the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Commissions held in May 1990 in Baghdad, at which they agreed on the need to strengthen joint programming of regional environmental activities with the Regional Commissions, the UNEP Regional Offices and other United Nations agencies carrying out regional environment programmes. It is hoped that this will be done as soon as possible and will be reflected in the 1992-1993 programme of work and budget of all concerned. To ensure and enhance the integration of environment into social and economic planning for environmentally sound and sustainable development, there should be a strengthening of the environmental capabilities of the Regional Commissions.

10. In its decision 15/1 on strengthening the role and effectiveness of UNEP, the Governing Council decided that the Bureau of its fifteenth session should, on an experimental basis, meet with their counterparts in the organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system to develop more positive and collaborative relationships. The ACC notes that interesting exchanges of views took place at meetings held between members of the Bureau of the Governing Council of UNEP and representatives from the governing bodies of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), (WMO), the United Nations Industrial Development (UNIDO), (FAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A. Matters arising from the Second Special Session of the Governing Council of UNEP

11. ACC notes the decisions of the Second Special Session of the Governing Council of UNEP, which was held in accordance with its decision 15/4 of 26 May 1989. ACC notes in particular decision GCSS.II/1 of 3 August 1990 relating to the strengthening of the role UNEP and the Governing Council. In this context, ACC reiterates the catalytic and co-ordinating role of UNEP in relation to environmental activities of the United Nations system.

12. ACC has noted that the Executive Director of UNEP was requested by the Governing Council in decision 15/10, entitled "A United Nations Centre for Urgent Environmental Assistance", to assess the advisability of establishing such a centre to ensure rapid response to requests for assistance and the financial implications involved, taking into account the relevant capacities and mandates of the United Nations system. ACC notes that Governments, as well as United Nations bodies and agencies, were invited to comment on the possible need for and functions of the proposed centre, as well as the intention of UNEP to carry out a feasibility study on the need to establish such a centre. In this context ACC emphasizes the necessity of adequately taking into account existing or planned mechanisms for providing urgent environmental assistance in assessing the desirability of establishing a centre and determining possible scope of action or otherwise improving the capacity of the United Nations system. Thus, ACC attaches importance to the full participation of all organs, organizations and programmes concerned in the feasibility study and its evaluation.

13. ACC notes the considerations of the Governing Council and the Executive Director of UNEP regarding the ideas of (i) a World Environment Academy, (ii) conflict resolution and (iii) appropriate responses to General Assembly resolution 44/224 of 22 December 1989 regarding international co-operation in the monitoring, assessment and anticipation of environmental threats, especially through the strengthening of Earthwatch in order to provide early warning of such environmental threats. ACC attaches importance to the full participation of relevant parts of the United Nations system in the further development of these ideas.

B. Development of International Legal Instruments

(i) Climate change

14. ACC notes that the issue of climate change continues to receive priority attention at the global level and notes in particular General Assembly resolution 44/207 of 22 December 1989 entitled "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind".

15. ACC notes that the Heads of Agencies met in February 1990 and requested that the need for an improved observing and monitoring system of global climate, including measurements of atmospheric, oceanic and land parameters, should be studied by the various United Nations agencies involved in a co-ordinated way. ACC notes that an inter-agency meeting was subsequently convened and that a report should be available when the Executive Heads meet again in November 1990. The report should cover existing data, present and future needs, and existing and planned activities of various agencies.

16. ACC welcomes the decisions of the WMO Executive Council and the Governing Council of UNEP on the development of a framework convention (Resolution 4.1/1, Decision 15/36 and Decision SS.II/3 part C respectively), as well as decisions relating to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Second World Climate Conference (SWCC). Preparations for the Second World Climate Conference included in intergovernmental meeting to prepare the draft of a ministerial declaration for SWCC (27-29 September 1990). The draft will be further revised by intergovernmental experts during the time of SWCC before adoption by ministers on 7 November 1990. SWCC will also prepare a conference statement to be based on the conclusions of the scientific part of SWCC to be issued simultaneously with the ministerial declaration.

17. ACC welcomes the conclusion of the report of othe WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change presented at the fourth meeting of IPCC (Sweden, August 1990). The report will be an important contribution to the Second World Climate Conference and will serve as a basis for development of policy responses at the global as well as the national level. ACC further welcomes the progress made by the various components of the World Climate Programme.

18. ACC notes that the Secretary-General of WMO and the Executive Director of UNEP have begun preparations for negotiations of a framework convention on climate change. An ad hoc working group of government representatives to prepare for negotiations was convened jointly by WMO and UNEP from 24-26 September 1990 in Geneva. The Experts adopted specific recommendations regarding the negotiating process. These will be considered by the United Nations General Assembly at its forty-fifth session in pursuance of its resolution 44/207 to recommend ways, means and modalities for further pursuing negotiations, taking into account the work of the Preparatory Committee of UNCED and then by the negotiating body at its first substantive session scheduled for February 1991 in Washington DC, USA.

19. ACC recognizes the need to assess climate change in a broader socio-economic context, including potentially important impacts of climate change on socio-economic development and vice-versa. ACC urges all relevant organizations and programmes of the United Nations system to be involved and contribute fully, within their areas of expertise and available resources, to the preparation of a convention on climate change and to study further the impacts of climate change on development and consider response strategies thereto.

(ii) Biological diversity

20. ACC notes the progress made in the UNEP-led effort to develop a global convention on biological diversity in accordance with decisions 15/34 and SS.II/5 of the Governing Council. The essential issues to be addressed include assessment of the cost of conservation, determining availability of funds and appropriate mechanisms for transfer of resources and technology, including biotechnology. It is necessary to develop the convention within a broad socio-economic context, paying particular attention to the spepcial situation of developing countries.

21. ACC notes the intention of the Executive Director to convene the first meeting of an Ad Hoc Working Group of Legal and Technical Experts on Biological Diversity in November 1990 to consider elements of the framework convention, which is hoped to be concluded and ready for signature at the time of the 1992 Conference. ACC welcomes the co-operation among members of the Ecosystems Conservation Group (UNEP, FAO, Unesco, IUCN, WWF) in developing elements for the convention and recommends their continuing participation in this process.

(iii) Conservation and development of forests

22. ACC notes that FAO had put forward the idea of a convention on the conservation and development of forests to meet the need to conserve and develop the world's forests for sustainable social and economic development, as well as for rational environmental management. The need for a global forest convention was recommended first by the Independent Review Team's report on the Tropical Forestry Action Plan and more recently at the Houston G-7 Summit.

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23. It was foreseen that such a convention would embrace all the world's forests, not only the tropical forests, and would help to foster international co-operation to conserve and develop forests. All efforts would be made to ensure appropriate linkages and references to the proposed conventions on climate change and biological diversity and that on forests so as to ensure close co-ordination and full compatibility among these conventions and their preparatory processes.

24. The elaboration of the convention was considered at the FAO's Committee on Forests in September 1990. The Committee on Forestry supported the concept of an international instrument and FAO's efforts contributing to its preparation. The matter will be discussed subsequently by the FAO Council in November 1990. An inter-agency meeting is envisaged in October 1990 for consultations and co-operation with the concerned organizations.

(iv) Marine pollution

25. ACC notes that IMO will convene a diplomatic conference (14-30 November 1990) to consider, inter alia, a convention on oil pollution preparedness and response. The convention will serve to enhance international co-operation in dealing with a marine environmental emergency involving oil and may be expanded to include other hazardous substances.

C. Joint Statement on the Environment

26. ACC notes the conclusions of the feasibility study for the preparation of a "Joint Statement on the Environment" carried out by Unesco on behalf of interested organizations. The feasibility study concluded, in broad terms, that the potential benefits of issuing such joint statements outweighed perceived difficulties in preparing them.

27. ACC also takes note of the discussion by DOEM on the desirability of preparing a first joint statement now. DOEM felt that the timing of such an ambitious joint undertaking must be synchronized with the tenor and rhythm of the preparatory process of UNCED. The preparatory period will be characterized above all by negotiations on environment and development issues. There is the risk that a joint statement at this time may interfere with this process.

28. ACC also notes that Unesco, in the light of the discussion of this issue at DOEM, would reflect further on the matter and consult further with interested organizations and the UNCED Secretariat.

D. 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

29. ACC notes resolution 44/228 in which the General Assembly decided to convene a Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil in 1992. ACC reiterates its strong commitment to support and contribute actively to the preparations for the Conference.

30. ACC notes the contribution of DOEM in drafting an overview report on system-wide activities in relation to the priority areas set forth in General Assembly resolution 44/228. The preparatory process led by the Secretary-General of the Conference should continue to draw on the experience and expertise of the bodies, organizations and programmes of United Nations

system, and the process should serve to enhance the co-ordination and co-operation on environment and development issues. ACC notes the report and the decisions of the First Substantive Session of the Preparatory Committee of UNCED and emphasizes the commitment of each organization, as appropriate, to follow-up and implement the decisions. ACC notes the importance of regional conferences in the preparatory process of UNCED and encourages its member organizations to support and participate in these efforts. As regards the preparation for the Conference at national level, special note is taken of the guidelines for national reports adopted by the Preparatory Committee and the role of the United Nations system could play in supporting Governmnts in their efforts to finalize reports by July 1991 in accordance with these guidelines.

31. ACC encourages its member bodies to undertake activities to analyze issues of a cross-cutting nature. In this regard, the ACC believes that the Preparatory Committee of UNCED could give greater attention, through an appropriate mechanism, to the issue of the cumulative interaction between poverty, health and population on the one hand and environmental degradation on the other.

E. Consequences of the Chernobyl accident

32. Following appeals for assistance from the USSR, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviety Socialist Republic, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 1990 adopted a resolution entitled "international co-operation in the elimination of the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant". ECOSOC requested the Secretary-General, within the framework of the report of the international assessment to be published by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the recommendations and decisions of ACC on the matter and the existing co-ordination mechanism of the Inter-Agency Committee for Response to Nuclear Accidents (IAC/RNA), to consider, facilitate and co-ordinate any further efforts that may be appropriate within the United Nations system. ECOSOC further requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on actions currently under way or planned with the United Nations system, particularly the international assessment and the WHO project on the long-term health consequences of the accident.

33. IAC/RAN, at a special meeting in Vienna in May 1990, held an initial discussion of various planned and ongoing Chernobyl assistance projects, in particular the above-mentioned international assessment in which FAO, IAEA, UNEP, UNSCEAR and the WHO project participated. The planned activities of UNDRO, Unesco, WMO and ILO were also discussed.

34. A visit of the affected areas by the United Nations programmes was carried out in September 1990.

35. The IAC/RNA Co-ordination Group on the Chernobyl Assistance Projects met on 5 September in Geneva and agreed on modalities for co-ordination. The results of the IAEA-led assessment and scientific work undertaken in the affected republics will be taken into account in the assistance given in the economic, social, and humanitarian fields.

F. Environmentally sound and sustainable development

(i) Integration of environmental considerations in development planning and projects

36. ACC recalls the importance it attached in its report to the Governing Council at its fifteenth session to the integration of environmental considerations into the process of economic and social development and into development planning. Following General Assembly resolution 42/186 on the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and 42/187 on the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, several Governments have prepared policy and position papers on the need for and the ways and means of pursuing environmentally sound and sustainable development. Some countries have prepared national plans of action for environment and sustainable development and held national consultations towards that end. The World Bank, UNDP, the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD) and UNEP are assisting Governments in these national initiatives.

37. ACC notes the various other initiatives, including the development of integrated economic-environmental accounting, studies on the effects of environmental policies and regulations on trade and industry, debt-for-nature swaps, internalization of environmental costs in production and consumption, and the environmental aspects of structural adjustment programmes. ACC supports the efforts by countries to integrate environmental considerations into the overall and sectoral socio-economic development policies. In this respect, ACC notes present efforts to introduce environmental considerations into the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, which should contribute to the formulation of international strategies on environment and development. The development and availability of know-how and appropriate technology is indispensable if developing countries are to succeed in these endeavours. ACC is aware of the need to establish mechanisms to facilitate technology transfer and notes the efforts of especially the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), UNEP, the United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD), UNIDO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in establishing modalities for such transfers.

38. In order for both environment and development needs to be adequately met, ACC is aware that additional financial resources will be required for the implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable development. In this respect, ACC welcomes the Global Environment Facility initiative jointly undertaken by the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP, and also the Multilateral Fund under the Montreal Protocol. Further consideration should also be given to pursuing existing and non-traditional sources of financing and to the involvement of the relevant United Nations agencies in their various areas of expertise.

39. Consideration should also be given to mobilizing additional resources, on concessional terms, to support environmental components involving important externalities in poverty alleviation endeavours.

40. To provide co-ordinated assistance to countries, in response to their request, integrating environmental considerations into development planning, an inter-agency steering committee was established with participation of interested organizations, namely UNDP, World Bank, UNEP, UNIDO, FAO, WHO, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), ILO, WMO, Unesco and a methodology and a procedure were developed and agreed on. Following agreed criteria, including relevant work carried on by agencies, the Governments of Malaysia, Costa Rica and Mali were approached with information on the inter-agency technical co-operation initiative. The Government of Malaysia has invited collaboration of the United Nations system in this regard. The UNDP office in Kuala Lumpur, along with UNEP and member agencies of the Steering Group, will oversee implementation of the activities following the agreed methodology and objectives.

41. ACC notes that while this process has indeed been very slow to proceed, it has the potential for providing innovative and useful experience concerning the integration of environment consideration in developing planning.

(ii) Application of environmental guidelines to operational activities of the system

42. In decision 1988/24, the ACC had decided that a review would be carried out by a consultant on the approaches followed by the organizations of the United Nations system with regard to environmental guidelines and their application to the operational activities of the system.

43. ACC notes that the final report has been considered by both the DOEM and the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (CCSQ (ops)) and welcomes efforts by organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to continue to develop and apply procedures for assessing possible positive and negative environmental implications of their development programmes and projects. In this respect, ACC notes the special initiative being carried out by UNDP concerning the preparation of environmental management guidelines.

44. ACC further notes that the UNEP Governing Council, at its Second Special Session in August 1990, discussed the subject of environmental impact assessment and draws its attention to the existing activities and efforts already under way within the United Nations system that should be fully taken into account in the examination of any future UNEP activities in this field.

(iii) Report of the Secretary-General on progress of implementing the General Assembly resolution on sustainable development

45. General Assembly resolution 44/227, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Preparatory Committee of UNCED, and for further submission to General Assembly at its 46th session, through the Governing Council of UNEP and the Economic and Social Council, a progress report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 44/227. It also requested the Secretary-General to submit to the 1992 Conference, and to the General Assembly at its 47th session, through the Governing Council and the Economic and Social Council, a new consolidated report on further substantive follow-up to General Assembly resolutions 42/186 and 42/187 by governments and the organizations of the United Nations system.

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46. Correspondingly, the Secretary-General will be submitting a concise progress report containing a synthesis and conclusions based on the inputs received from governments and United Nations agencies and bodies.

II. CO-ORDINATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

(i) Contributions to the preparatory process of UNCED-1992

47. ACC recalled that the General Assembly in its resolution 44/172 invited the UNEP Governing Council "to contribute substantially to the discussion on desertification at the Conference by undertaking a general evaluation of progress achieved in implementing the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification". ACC takes note of the initiative taken by UNEP to involve the international community in the global assessment of desertification and preparation of a Thematic Atlas of Desertification, which will constitute key components of the report on general evaluation required by the General Assembly resolution. ACC also notes the planned actions by UNEP to utilize the Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification (IAWGD) mechanism in assemblying relevant information to contribute to the reports required both under the General Assembly resolution 44/172 and the decisions of the Preparatory Committee of UNCED-1992 at its first meeting in August 1990, Nairobi.

48. ACC encourages an interaction process among agencies of the United Nations system concerning preparation of various reports to minimize duplication of effort. In this regard ACC notes with satisfaction the initiative taken by the UNCED Secretariat to establish an ad hoc working group at which agencies most concerned with desertification will be represented to meet the requirements of the General Assembly and the UNCED Preparatory Committee.

(ii) DESCON-7 and DESCON-8 sessions

49. The ACC recalls General Assembly resolution 44/172 reaffirming the mandates of the Consultative Group for Desertification Control as contained in resolutions 32/172 and 39/168. In this regard ACC notes that UNEP will be convening two DESCON sessions before UNCED-1992 as requested by General Assembly resolution 44/172. ACC recommends that DESCON be utilized as a mechanism for exchange of experiences and information by United Nations agencies and the international community, in particular on mobilization of funding, emerging from the various mechanisms used for funding such as the Nature Conservation Strategies of IUCN, the Tropical Forest Action Plans of FAO, the Environmental Action Plan of the World Bank, the National Action Plans for Combating Desertification co-ordinated by UNEP and UNSO and the IFAD Special Programme for Sub-Saharan African countries affected by drought and desertification.

(iii) Inter-Agency co-operation

50. ACC notes with satisfaction the action taken at the initiative of the IAWGD to assist the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) to formulate a Plan of Action for the Kalahari-Namib region within the frame of existing programmes and available resources. ACC considers this as a useful exercise in enhancing inter-agency co-operation, in particular with SADCC.

(iv) Implementation of PACD in the Sudano-Sahelian region

51. ACC takes note with satisfaction the action taken by UNSO, in close co-operation with the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahelian Zone (CILSS) and the International Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), to assist the countries of the Sudaro-Sahelian Region in their preparation for UNCED-1992, as requested by General Assembly resolution 44/172.

52. ACC notes with satisfaction the results of a meeting organized by UNSO in August 1990 on harmonization of strategic frameworks for environment and natural resources management attended by World Bank, FAO, UNEP and IUCN. ACC expresses hope that the guidelines and measures at the meeting can enhance co-ordination among agencies concerned.